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WOMEN IN THE BBC

Note by D.Pers.

1. In Minute 204 of 24 April 1972 Board of Management welcomed the intention to examine carefully and critically the question of the limitations to the recruitment and advancement of women in the BBC. This examination has now been undertaken and the report by Douglas Morgan, Chief Assistant, Appointments Department, with some assistance from Miss Barbara Todd, Assistant, Appointments Department, (Appendix A) sets out the pattern of enquiries in detail.

The Report

2. This paper attempts to summarise the main points in the report and to suggest conclusions and recommendations for the consideration of Board of Management.
3. The report is based on a large number of discussions with a broad cross-section of line managers, personnel officers, and other members of staff. Care was taken to interview considerable numbers of women, both those who had been successful in developing their careers and those who felt they had not been so successful or who had a particular point of view which they wished to put forward. The ABS were also invited to express their views.

The General Climate

4. There is considerable force behind present moves towards providing women with equal opportunities in terms of employment. For example, a suggested case of discrimination against female recruitment in the BBC has been referred to the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Baroness Seear's Anti-Discrimination Bill. In the Commons William Hamilton, M.P. in moving the second reading of this same Bill referred to the small number of women in top jobs in the BBC. The Home Civil Service has lately opened a number of categories of posts to women for the first time.
5. These changes and pressures and others, often more emotional, mean that the arguments justifying the non-employment or very limited employment of women in particular areas are now constantly and strongly challenged and need to be very much more compelling than in the past.

The General Situation in the BBC

6. One-third of all the staff (8500) are female; women have always had equal pay; there is no bar against women advancing to the most senior posts; there are over 600 women now in AS, OP and MP graded posts (excluding Producer's Assistants) who joined the BBC in secretarial or clerical posts. In all this, the BBC compares well with employers generally.
7. The picture is not so satisfactory from the women's point of view, however, when a more detailed look is taken at particular areas. There are still areas in the BBC where recruitment is closed to women; there are other areas where although recruitment is theoretically open to women few, if any, are ever appointed; only 5.6% (i.e. 81 out of 1434) of senior posts (MP5 and above) are held by women. These represent the three situations which it is the main purpose of this paper to consider.

Areas which are Closed to the Recruitment of Women

8. Advertisements and recruitment literature which positively exclude women are now issued on behalf only of certain limited Engineering areas, since both Television Programme Services (Film Operations and Services, Scenic Artists, Floor Assistants) and Publications Management (Production, Distribution and Circulation) have lifted similar exclusions.
9. The reasons put forward for the limited ban on female recruitment in Engineering and for their somewhat wider unwillingness to appoint women are many and various; the most often quoted are the following, which are not listed in any particular order of priority and which must be seen against the background that very few women qualify as engineers and, of those that do, only a percentage are interested in the telecommunications field:
 - (i) The BBC's job is to broadcast and not to provide equal career opportunities for women. Where, for any of the reasons which follow, it appears that women are likely to give less satisfactory service, recruitment should not be open to them.
 - (ii) The presence of women in a working team can create unnecessary emotional problems, while a man and a woman alone together at a remote site could well cause marital difficulties.

- (iii) Women are not suited to heavy physical work. Because of this the male members of a mixed crew would have to undertake more than their fair share of heavy work, either through chivalry or the need to get the work done.
- (iv) Jobs which might involve such hazards as exposure to really bad weather or working alone at night are not suitable for women.
- (v) Women are not suited to driving the heavier types of vehicle.
- (vi) To give women expensive training is uneconomic since far more women than men will leave early for marriage/family reasons.
- (vii) Experience has shown that in their later years women are less able than men to cope with the demands of shift (particularly night shift) and irregular hour working.
- (viii) There is often male resentment to accepting orders from a woman.

10. When these arguments are considered individually in the present climate of thinking, it seems at best doubtful whether they provide grounds for the continuing complete exclusion of women from consideration. They do, however, provide strong reasons why women are unlikely to be appointed or are at best likely to be appointed in very small numbers in these areas. As long as there is a complete ban on women in force, those arguing on the women's behalf can represent the BBC as having a closed mind in this matter and can support this view with a number of questions that are not easy to answer. They can ask whether the BBC is justified in excluding all women from undertaking heavy physical work, from exposure to the elements, from working alone at night, from driving heavy vehicles, etc. without giving the women the opportunity to take some part in these decisions themselves? They can ask how the BBC can plead economic grounds for not giving training in the Engineering field to women when it accepts similar economic risks in training women P.O.A.s and News staff? They can point out that if women are less able to work shift, etc. hours in later years, it is strange that this limitation means a ban on the recruitment of women in the Engineering field but nowhere else in the BBC. One answer which may be advanced is that since there is an abundant supply of young men suitable for junior engineering and technical vacancies the forces of economics and efficiency mean that we do not need to employ women if there is the slightest risk that they will not give the same continuity of service as

men. This, it is suggested, would be of greater strength in justifying non-selection than in supporting non-consideration.

11. It seems, therefore, that the BBC's position here would be a much more tenable one were the ban on female recruitment removed while making it clear that for a number of sound and stated reasons the number of actual appointments was likely to be very small. Relatively few women are likely to be qualified and to apply for posts and fewer still to be appointed, but it would be clear that they were considered on their individual merits and not excluded by a blanket ban. The very facts that on average their sick leave is higher, their resignation rate is higher, their domestic circumstances more difficult, mean that the odds are to an extent against them from the start and that in many cases they are likely to price themselves out of the market for these and similar reasons.

Areas which are not Closed to Female Recruitment but where Few if any Women are Actually Recruited

12. Here again, it is a question of the strength of the reasons why women are not appointed in considerable numbers or possibly at all. If the reasons are sound and acceptable there is nothing to worry about, but if this can be shown not to be the case then the BBC's position is a weaker one than in the Engineering situation since the accusation of dishonesty can be added to any other criticisms.
13. Chief Assistant, Appointments Department, noted six main areas apart from the Engineering context already referred to, where, although recruitment is open to women, relatively few if any were actually appointed. These were: Television Programme Services, Publications Management, News and Current Affairs, Presentation, Light Entertainment and Outside Broadcasts.
14. There are a mass of reasons advanced for the relative absence of women. For example: In Film Group there is the heaviness of camera and recording equipment, the discomfort or even danger faced by mobile film crews, the need in some posts for an apprenticeship or craft training background.

In Design Group there can be a need for electrical skills and a mixture of technical and artistic aptitude, there is a need to undertake heavy work and a need in some posts for a craft training background.

In Studio Management the first step towards female recruitment at the most junior level has been taken but it will take some time for the effect to show.

In Publications Management the recruitment ban on women has just been removed but there remain various reasons why few are likely to be appointed. There is in some posts a need for printing qualifications not apparently obtainable by women. It would be difficult for women to deal with the tough all-male world of representatives in the printing trade. In some posts there is the heavy physical element, and in some a requirement to work continually away from home and alone.

In News and Current Affairs there is the view that men do not like taking orders from women, there is the hesitation to send women on dangerous (e.g. war zone) or tough (e.g. militant picketing) assignments. There is the problem of a refined accent disliked by women in the audience and a female voice being unacceptable in many countries overseas. There is the unwillingness of the female audience to accept an attractive woman reporter. However, it is worth noting that the News Training Scheme is in fact bringing excellent women into this general area.

In Presentation the same problems arise of the effect of a woman's voice or appearance on the female portion of the audience.

In Light Entertainment (Television) the first tentative steps are being taken to give women an opportunity. But both in Radio and Television it is felt that women are not good judges of comedy.

In Outside Broadcasts sporting programmes deal very largely with what is "a man's world" and several reasons are quoted to show why they need to be covered by men. The same is not true of Events, but satisfactory women producers do not appear to come forward.

15. The position in public discussion would be greatly strengthened if Board of Management were to encourage the giving of opportunities to women in areas where this was feasible to show whether the male doubts about their capabilities are justified. This could, perhaps, best be begun through attachments and, in order to be fair, ought to involve several women rather than a single individual.

The Shortage of Women in Posts on MP5 and Above

16. As stated earlier in this paper, there are 81 women (5.6%) and 1353 men in posts on MP5 and above, whereas there are

8500 women and 16,500 men in the BBC as a whole. While considering figures, it is worth noting that during 1971 1139 men and 47 (4%) women applied for vacancies on MP5 and above and 95 men and 5 (5%) women were selected. The report, on page 26, sets out four recurrent theories why women do not apply for advancement in greater numbers:

- (i) Women are not by nature aggressive, tend to dislike competitive situations, and, being more easily discouraged than men, need to be offered more positive enticement.
- (ii) Our present society tends to look to women more than men for the support of children and old people and the playing of general domestic roles. Working women may have to balance the opposing forces delicately. Further responsibility can upset the equilibrium.
- (iii) To the stresses inherent in a senior appointment is added, for women, the feeling of being under close scrutiny and having no margin for error, particularly in a pioneer situation. This disincentive is further reinforced if the vacancy lies in an area which has a reputation of harbouring prejudice against women.
- (iv) Women are not sufficiently qualified for top jobs because there are restrictions operating at an earlier stage of their working lives.

17. These are compelling reasons but they do leave the question whether there is anything the BBC should be doing in this situation. It is suggested that:

- (a) all concerned with the development of potential require to be reminded of the need to look particularly carefully for ability in their female staff at all levels and to encourage that ability since clearly their potential is not being fully developed at present;
- (b) management should ensure that women are not discouraged from applying for senior posts, i.e. MP5 level and above;
- (c) in the present consideration which is being given to such matters as the introduction of more flexible working hours and the setting up of creches, their value as a particular means of improving the opportunities for women and the level of responsibility they could carry should be given full weight.

Summary

18. These recommendations are framed to meet the present pressures to give women at least a level opportunity of competing with men over the field of employment in the BBC. These pressures are themselves political and because of this the reaction to them is a political necessity.

It is therefore recommended that:

- OK ✓
- (1) No vacancies should be advertised "for men only", nor should recruitment literature state that women are excluded from applying for any posts. It should be left to the recruitment processes to take account of individual female limitations in the context of each vacancy.
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- (2) Women should be given a positive opportunity, possibly by means of attachments in the first place, of showing whether they can perform satisfactorily in areas where, although posts are technically open to them, they have been up till now seldom if ever appointed.
- ✓
- (3) Steps should be taken to ensure that potential among women members of staff is being as positively encouraged and developed as is the case with their male colleagues. It being noted that this is particularly important in the senior areas.
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- (4) Consideration should be given to the question of whether conditions of service can and should be re-cast in any way to make it easier for women to combine a working life with their domestic commitments.
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- (5) A progress report should be submitted for consideration by Board of Management in twelve months' time.

Publication of Report

19. There will undoubtedly be pressure to publish the Report and something will have to be released.

I would propose, however, to argue, if Board of Management agrees, that views expressed in it can be attributed to individuals and that there is no reason why they should be exposed to charges of "male chauvinism" by female chauvinists.